

the greenleaf review



2022

Cover—Untitled

Pippin Bucholtz

Pen and Ink

A dedication:

The 2022 issue of *The Greenleaf Review* is dedicated to our contributors, for their exceptional work; to our staff, for their efforts; to our readers, for indulging us; and, most especially, to our friend and mentor, Jennie Malboeuf, who we'll really miss having as our faculty advisor! Our experiences producing and publicizing this mag wouldn't have been the same without you these last four years, and we wish you the best.

A note on structure:

This year, we've organized all our accepted pieces from conceptually "smallest" to "largest." Works at the beginning will tend to be focused, detailed moments; from them will emerge pieces with broader themes and wider, unquantifiable concepts or timeframes.

A visual content warning:

Page 42, on the 42-43 spread, contains a depiction of a person holding a pair of scissors over their tongue. We thought some viewers might benefit from an advance notice.

The Greenleaf Review

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Eeyore

Ezra Wilson

Pen and Ink, Monotype

paper towel

Avi Kumar

a paper towel
is textured and dipped in whipped cream
thick skin so utterly disposable, foldable, a multipurpose doormat, laying flat,
grating and waiting for a paved path of
soiled soles, bedraggled boots, spills of soot
a chance to do her job
to listen as others sob
to rob them so selfishly of their pain for a twisted internal
gain, a toxic theology threaded deep
in her veins
capillary action peels her to fractions, ragged ropes dragging,
high hopes sagging, soaked by the
dirt and the lightning and the ice-cold rain
the paper towel
is limp and dipped in hot sips of french roast
thinned skin so utterly ready to rip ready to
bloat, to disintegrate and float
yet still holding on
forever awaiting the glorious day
the sun will come out and evaporate the pain
so it may dry up another bay absorb another lake
and live, another day

Cotton Candy

Rou Yu Tan

Kids don't give other kids their cotton candy. It's a rare and precious luxury only offered during summer funfairs. An irrelevant carnival worker offers the cotton candy one by one on a sleek white cone that's circumnavigated the magic cotton candy machine thirty times around. My shadow casts over the crowd as I watch my brothers follow the white cone's roundabout with drooling eyes, never able to comprehend the origin of the carbohydrate strands. I agree—it's real witchcraft. But I was always smart enough to never believe my parents when they told me a large spider from Candyland pooped it out.

Kids don't give other kids cotton candy. We all know it's a rare and precious luxury that we only get to buy on unusually enjoyable days. I extend my hand out from the crowd of other nine year olds, victorious, as I wrap my fingers around the bouquet. My shoulders hunch over protectively. My back faces against the bandits with the worst track records (who were also once my siblings), and I grip on to the candy as if it was an ancient diamond from Indiana Jones, until I reach the ultimate satisfaction of melting each and every fiber of sugar on the papillae of my tongue. Coming down to the last wisps, I side-eye my brother to survey his cotton candy supply.

"Can I have some cotton candy, Jun Xi?"

"No."

"Pretty please?"

"No."

"But you got more than me."

"Nuh-uh!"

So with the lack of interest for appeasement, I stretch over an elastic arm to snatch a handful of the coveted gold (usually, a strategy with a fifty percent success rate). However, within a few minutes' time, the pink and blue clouds will be dissolved. Eventually, we throw our white cones in the trash, skipping further along the sparse grass, our attention already caught by water guns that squirt amusingly at the tiny cut-out of creepy clowns.

On the drive home, my brother and I anticipate the next time we set foot on carnival grounds. For the time being, we are rationing of the free KitKats we seized by bucketloads last October. I try to keep track of the days; I log how many Skittles my brother took from my pack. I wonder when we'll go back to a funfair again.

What if we never do? Will we be able to go? It's already been a month since my brother launched my freshly liberated baby tooth off the balcony. It was last week he popped the last remaining animal cracker into his mouth. Last night, he crawled beside me and tugged on my hair.

But today he offered his hand out and said, "Want some cotton candy?" And I remember all the years that have rolled by.



Blackberry Butterfly
Grace Kauder
Digital Photograph



Beautifully Broken

Lydia Saunders

Digital Photograph

Sliver of a Silver Lining

Alesha G.

The sterile and static running jokes I have with myself
are the mundane collection of sundays that fit like lint in jean pockets
I call it pouring salt on wounds that do not heal unless they burn just right.
A sensation that strokes and takes from the pile of built up fonder
where I think you and think you think me too
but what if I told you the fissure
melds seamlessly
the next day
after tomorrow.

OR26A

Alys Parker

I may have that gene
But I still like cilantro
And love eating soap



Dennisland
Grace Calus
Digital Photograph

South Searching

Alesha G.

Moss grows purple

next week

I see you <glowing>

Slip

ping

Into

today

down

under

me

flourishing

glitter reflects off your eyes | glitter

sparkling softly

our mind as a frontier|mind

bridging / elixir \ the taste

dumbfounded \ far reaching \ locked away

soft skin \ out of touch

no taste | no

next week

when purple moss bends southward

I'll see you glowing

Slip

ping

Into

today

flourishing

down

under

me

I've been south searching
because no one told me: Moss grows northward.



Oh Barnacles!

Lydia Saunders

Digital Photograph

The Bar's Bathroom

Emma English

My favorite place, a perfect escape
Broken floor tiles, graffiti on walls
Bins overflowing with pasties, bra tape
Tampon wrappers left under stalls

The trashiest place where I can break
The fiction of my effortless grace
Give in to my pounding headache
Take out my makeup to fix my face

Ask other women for eyelash glue
Swap stories and shit-talk, call it advice
I'll say I hate men, they'll say girl me too
They'll say you look hot, I'll say you're so nice

But soon we go back into the night
Back to perform under harsh, strobing light

Her Grin

Avi Kumar

I was sitting there for breakfast, sitting all alone, I thought I would make friends but I guess I was wrong, powdered eggs in my mouth and dirt grime grease under my nails, hair, arms. she sat next to me, what's your name, where are you from?

I don't remember, who remembers? I only remember the weeks afterward, the weeks of inching closer, stars aligning, hopes rising, of writing to her
saint's

hands, her angel's laugh, her tender skin and damp hair, her

grin

with that

grin

not a soul was

spared, shared, or cared for.

they would all much rather gather, skin lathering in sun and sticky grass, in thick gray raindrops or even swampy sweat just to see her
grin,

her staircased laugh, her tiny teeth a sugary sweet treat that tastes even better when stolen, swollen by my lightning

strikes of jumbled words or strangled sentences that iron out with an apologetic giggle, a playful pout

all in a desperate, begging bid to provoke her tiny teeth and canorous
cackle and her

grin

once more

El Poder de Una Agujita

Kayla Krest

Tan extraño que
Un minuto me da besos
Y el próximo ya se fue
De este mundo

Que por una agujita
Se le entró un líquido
Que se le mató

Y aunque se que
Lo que le mató era el tumor
No puedo pararme de
Echar toda la culpa a la aguja

Una agujita
Mató a mi perrita

Como una ninita era
Con tanta energia
Gordita pareció pero
Asi no era

Content warning for pet euthanasia.

The Power of a Needle (translation)

Kayla Krest

How strange that
One minute she gives me kisses
And the next she's gone
From this world

That, through a needle
Entered a liquid
That killed her

And while I know that
What killed her was the tumor
I can't stop myself from
Blaming just the needle

A needle
Killed my puppy

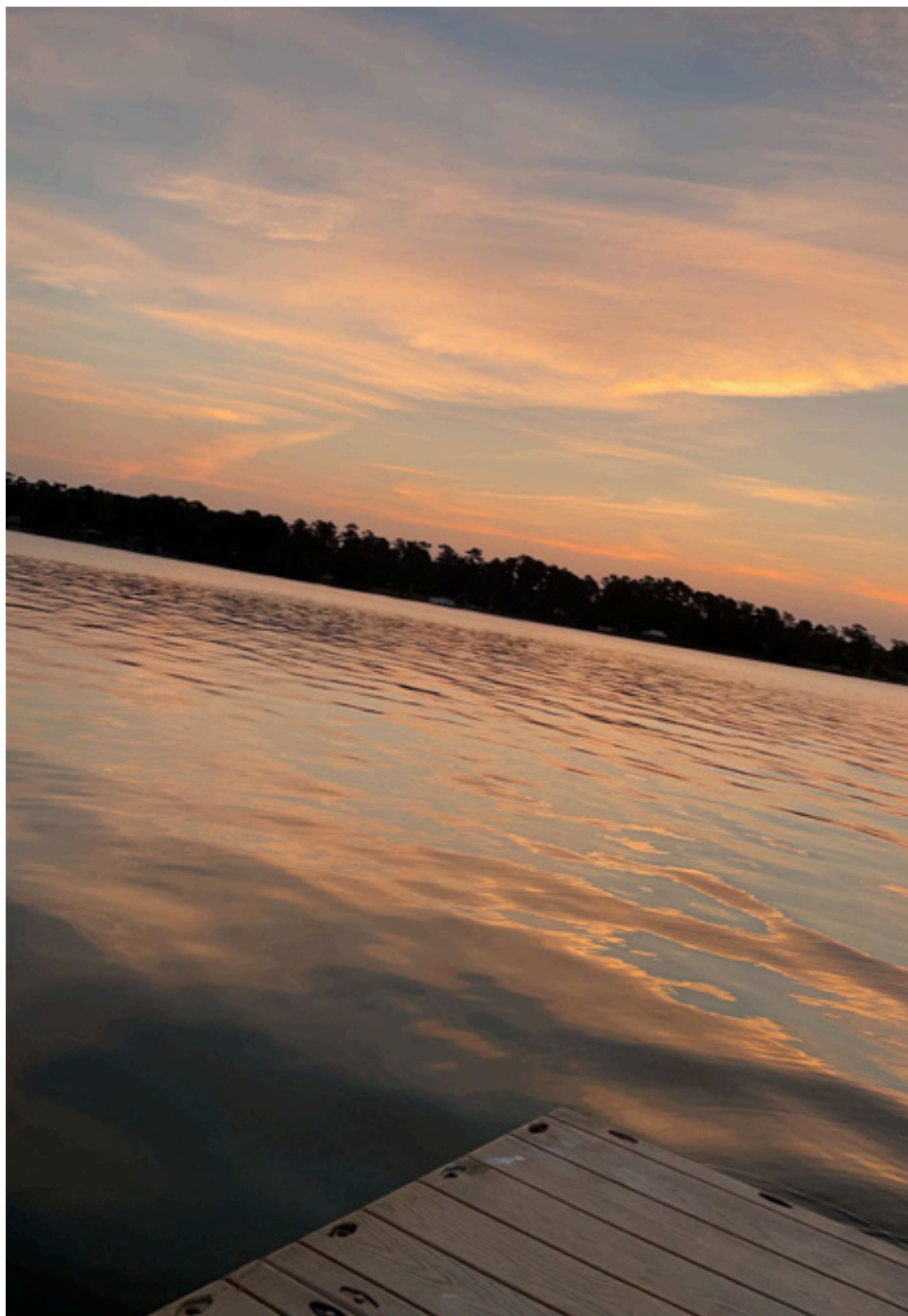
Like a child
With so much energy
Appearing fat
But she was not

Content warning for corporal punishment.

Beginner's Guide to Picking a Switch

Emma English

stall for as long as you can
long enough to watch your sneakers
sink into the soft dirt that swells
back up changed, marked
with shoe-patterned welts
speckling the grass like flowers
the crocus irises and catmint
that grow purple-bright like bruises
but don't stay to look at their petals
you can't stall for too long
you're being watched from the back
window, so walk to the oak tree
pick a stick from the ground,
one weak enough to have fallen
already, don't test it's strength
by whipping it in the air, the wind
will curl around it so sharp and swift
it will sound worse than the crack
of a belt, which you know hurts
worse than any twig, don't let it
lie to you, pick it up and go inside
and if you hesitate by the door
if you pause to look up at the sky
don't see the blue and think God
because even He can't save you now



Floating Dock
Kylee Duarte
Digital Photograph

For the Jawbone Woman

Alys Parker

The sheets of dusty tangles 'round her head
Made her a tree with hanging Spanish moss—
Less live oak than birch; pale white, like the dead.
Fake flowers sat atop her hair. Across
Her chest were strung real bones. A well-worn pile
Of runic notes and creatures sketched with love
On yellowed papers she clutched tightly while
She kept pace, her feet beating ground. Above
Her soles her form was hid by linens in
Pastoral shades of grass, wild blooms, and mud.
To us who gawked she'd peer straight back and grin
With a gaze warm and pure as oozing blood.
But of her face I have no memory.
I fled her eyes as she stared long at me.

Forest of Bones

Angela Nelson

What I could see of the world around me was spinning. Most of it was covered in nightfall. I ran as fast as my legs could carry me, darting between shadowed columns that only vaguely resembled trees. My breathing was quick and heavy. My lungs were burning trying to keep up with the rest of my body. Branches and brambles around me scratched my skin as I ran. The bitter wind whipped against my face. My feet began to meld with the ground as my vision went blurry, but I was determined not to pass out before I reached safety. I needed to get out of the forest. The lights in the distance were bright against the night sky, taunting me with how close they seemed. Somehow, the more that I ran, the further away they got. I stumbled over at the crest of a hill, falling down its slope and into the base of a tree. Grasping the ridges of the bark, I pulled myself back up. My hand fell to my side where the majority of my pain was. All this running was making my injuries worse. There was a rip in the right side of my shirt where my bloodied skin was exposed. The sound of it ripping still rang in my ears. The shine of metal still flashed in my vision. The cold still pierced my skin. A large slash leaked that crimson ichor that humans know too well. I coughed, spitting blood onto the ground, the taste of iron filling my mouth. I needed to keep moving.

A cool breeze rustled the leaves in the trees around me, making some fall gently downwards. Sunbeams poked through the holes, following the leaves in their pursuit to reach the ground. Another summer had come and gone. The leaves were still green, for the most part, but they were in the beginning stages of changing to much more vibrant colors. It was still warm too. Warm enough that any people that decided to walk the old road trails would probably be wearing shorts and a t-shirt. I don't know how long ago I found my way to this trail, but now that I had, I hesitated to leave it again. The forest extended for miles and miles in pretty much any direction, and you could find yourself in some pretty dangerous places if you weren't careful. This trail in particular was about six miles from one end to the other, leading from the relative safety of civilization to a quiet campground and the old town historic site. The trail also diverged in a couple of places. The most famous being the old Barclay house. Legend

had it, in 1787, Maddock Barclay was robbed and killed on his way home. Supposedly his spirit still wandered this forest searching for the items that were stolen from him. There were other stories about this forest too. Namely a betrayed bride who jumped from one of the cliffsides near Trail 3 after being left at the altar and a group of hikers who, overconfident in their abilities to hike without a map, got lost in the woods and eventually starved to death. I had been here long enough to know that if those stories were true, the spirits of those wretched souls had been luckier than me. I was the only one who haunted these woods.

I sat on the ground in a clearing that housed a small meadow, my clearing, watching the wind sway the tree branches above me. My clearing wasn't far from the trail. I could still see the markers from here. At one point it had actually been used as a picnic site. There were a few old picnic tables made of rotting wood and covered in carved graffiti scattered around. It was no surprise to me when I heard voices and footsteps walking towards me. I knew that someone must be spending their day out in the beautiful weather. It's what the voices were talking about that caught my interest.

"How about up there, Max? There's a nice meadow here with a couple of picnic benches that we could sit on. Looks like a nice backdrop too."

"Yeah, I guess that looks good."

"Sweet. Alex and I will run and get the camera and other equipment."

I didn't get up, instead preferring to stay seated under my tree at the edge of the meadow. I watched as a figure came closer, eventually crossing under the arch of branches into the open space across from me.

Even at this distance, I recognized him immediately. It wasn't just any Max, it was my Max. The same Max that asked me out in our junior year of high school. The Max that I would stay up until 2 am texting with, debate about movies with, and sing loudly and badly in the car with. The Max that I disappeared on. His hair was shorter now than when I last saw him. He used to have to tie it up to keep it out of his face. His skin was a darker brown now too, as if he had spent all summer outside. He's also lost his glasses. They used to be that big trendy kind with silver frames, but sometime since I disappeared, he'd changed them out for contacts. When we used to come out here on the weekends, he used to look like he could reach up and touch the tops of the trees, like he could reach the sky and pull apart the clouds like cotton candy. Now, he's folded in on himself.

He starts to walk towards me, but all I can think about is the pain of knowing that he won't be able to see me. They can never see me.

"Excuse me, um, we're about to start filming a show over on the picnic benches. You don't have to leave or anything, I just wanted you to know so that we don't bother you."

Now this was a surprise. I looked up at him, quickly standing up so that I could be face to face with him. Upon seeing my face, he was just as shocked as I was.

"Dani?"

"Max? You can see me?"

"Dani? What the hell? Where have you been? You've been gone for two years! Do you know how worried we all were about you?"

I looked at the ground. I know it must have been hard for him.

"Yes," was the only response I could muster.

"Do you know that I was their number one suspect? You know how long I was interrogated? You know how people treated me? They thought I killed you!"

"I'm sorry. This was never how I wanted things to end up."

"I just—I just don't understand what happened. Why'd you disappear?"

"You think I did it on purpose?"

"Well obviously you did."

At that point we heard the voices from before coming back and two more people walked through the trees. The first was another familiar face: Becca. She was one of the mutual friends that Max and I shared. We had all met in high school, and though she had gone to a different college, we had all kept in touch. The last person was someone new, but I guessed that this must have been the Alex that Becca mentioned earlier.

"If you'll excuse me."

"Wait, Max, can we continue this conversation after your show?"

He looked unsure, but I could tell that his answer was leaning towards a "no."

"Please, Max, you are the only one I can talk to."

He didn't get the chance to answer me, because Becca came over.

"Hey, Max... what are you doing?"

"Having a pretty unpleasant conversation that I'd really rather not be having."

"With who?"

Her face dropped as he said that, into a worried expression.

"With Dani."

He said it so matter-of-factly and gestured to me as he did so, but it was clear that she didn't see me. Alex came over to see what was happening.

"Max...Dani is gone. You know that. There's no one there." Becca said.

"You're telling me you can't see her?"

"Are you feeling alright? Maybe you should sit down for a minute."

"Yeah, yeah, you're right. Maybe I am seeing things. Let's just start the show."

"Max, you aren't seeing things, please! I need your help!"

He ignored me, following his friends back to the picnic table where Alex had gotten everything set up. There was an expensive-looking camera sitting on a tripod on top of the table. To the left of it sat a laptop. As they reached the table Becca and Max clipped small microphones to their shirts and sat down across from the camera. Alex went to the other side and started messing with the laptop.

"Alright, just the intro first, then we'll introduce the equipment and the legends, then we'll move to the Barclay house, sound good?" Alex said. The other two nodded in agreement so Alex pressed a button on the camera giving Max and Becca a thumbs up.

"Hello, everyone, and welcome to The Spirit Box, the show where we explore the truthfulness behind urban legends, the possibility of life after death, and try to interact with those stuck between worlds. I'm Max."

"And I'm Becca, and today we are looking into the legends surrounding the forest of Emersville, Pennsylvania. Now, Max, this is where you went to college, right? So, why don't you explain the legends of the area to our viewers?"

As Max was explaining the legends and the fact that they were planning on going to the old Barclay house later in the evening, an idea for how I could make him believe me popped into my head.

I waited until they got to the segment of their show where they brought out the different types of equipment.

"Just as a refresher for you guys, here's the equipment that we brought."

Max held up a small black box that looked like a radio with an antenna up first. Becca explained that this was the spirit box and that it would switch through radio stations to help ghosts harness energy to communicate and that by switching through them at such a high frequency, if they get more than one word in a row, it would be counted as evidence. Max held up a couple of other items, but the only other one

that interested me, was the EMF reader. As he showed it to the camera, he turned it on demonstrating how it would be used. This is exactly what I wanted.

As he put it down on the wooden table, the lights on the reader went down, showing that there was no ghost or technological interference. I held my hand over it, spiking the lights into the red zone. I held it there for as long as it took for Max to look at me, and when he did, his eyes grew so wide I thought they were going to pop out of his head.

“Cut the camera,” he said.

“What? But we’re in the middle of a take!” Alex said.

“And we’ve got evidence here. We should do a full session.” Becca added.

“No. Just no.”

“But Max—”

He wasn’t paying attention to them anymore. Instead, his eyes were on me. I could tell he didn’t want this to be true.

“Are you saying what I think you’re saying?”

His voice wavered, tears threatening to spill over onto his cheeks. I nodded slowly pulling my hand away from the EMF reader.

“I wanted to tell you, but I didn’t know how. And then you thought you were seeing things and—”

While I was talking, I heard a loud static and then smaller bursts. The spirit box caught the tail end of my sentence.

“Will you guys cut it out? I’m not using my dead girlfriend for the show!” he shouted, turning away from me and back towards them.

There was a small silence as Becca and Alex processed this, then Becca spoke.

“Wait, you mean...”

“Yeah. I knew I wasn’t seeing things.”

“Wait if she’s visible to you, then how come we can’t see her?” Alex asked. “I don’t know.”

I needed to speak now, before they started freaking out too much and left.

“Max, I need you to do something for me.”

He turned back to look at me.

“What?”

“I need you to dig up that tree over there, the one that I was sitting under when you found me earlier.”

“Why?”

“Just—please.”

Max stood up and began walking towards the tree. Becca, Alex and I followed behind him.

“What did she ask you?” Becca asked.

“To dig up this tree. You want to help me?”

The three knelt together around the base of the tree, and began clawing at the soft dirt beneath its roots. They dug and dug, caking their skin with dirt and sweat, until they finally found what I wanted to be found. They screamed, falling back onto the grass behind them, pushing themselves away, trying to distance themselves from the pile of bones that they’d just discovered.



Mahal Kita, Lola
Ananya Bernardo
Woodcut

If You Can't Beat Them, Work with Them

Angela Nelson

I meet with my demons every Sunday. Some of them I see more than that.

Two sisters, I see every day.

Their forearms are covered in watches that are always ticking down,
their eyes, hidden behind masks that look like skulls,
reflect the thousand thoughts that never seem to slow,
and they tell me that I need to be doing something productive
or I will be a failure.

A disappointment in the eyes of my friends and family.

The demon that haunts my dreams I see almost every night.

Don't let her fool you. She is always awake,
even though her eyes are never open.

If, perchance, you find her when they are, one glance is all it takes.

Sundays are our days to just talk.

We sit in a circle in those horrible fold-out chairs,
and awkwardly face each other

like some sort of group-therapy session.

My angels are there too.

You never hear about people's angels,
but they are there if you know where to look.

Mine sit unhappily, glaring at their siblings dressed in black.

The one that manages my creativity is writing in a little book.

She's always writing, but, somehow, she still pays attention.

The angel in charge of confidence is there too,

but she is little and sits on the lap
of the one who controls patience.

The three of them have a project going.

Their hands are smudged with ink and graphite,
but they don't seem to mind.

All of them know that we have to work together in order to function,
because as everyone knows

there are two sides to every coin and multiple sides to every person.

As always, I am the one to start, and I raise the issue of
how we will face tomorrow.



Beast

Grace Kauder

Drawing

Like Father, Like Daughter

Emma English

Jean grew up in the dirt. She always had some type of filth sticking to her skin, like the dust from the thick gray pellets she sat in on early mornings when her father would take her out to feed the cattle. She'd throw on a ratty t-shirt she had lying somewhere around her room, usually one by her bed that she stomped into the carpet with muddy sneakers, and sprint out the door. Her father struggled to keep up with her. She wouldn't stop running, despite her shoes sinking into the soil newly wet with the dew that comes with daybreak, until she reached the barn. Jean had enough time to coat the bottom of the trailer with pellets, taking them out of the heavy bags in handfuls, before her father got there all out of breath. He'd take the bags and fill the trailer up all the way up while Jean kicked at the haystacks and tried not to sneeze. Eventually, he'd call out to her to stop messin' around. Jean knew this meant he had finished and hitched the trailer to his tractor. She'd rush over to get help being hoisted in the back, a clumsy process that involved much shiftin' and slidin' and the spray of heavy dust clouds that lingered in the air, that caught the light spilling in from the barn's weather-worn roof. Her father would grin at her, his mouth breaking open the same way the sun splits the sky into morning, before getting in the tractor. The clunky putter of the tractor's exhaust and Jean's shrill shrieks every time they hit a pothole and the dirt kicked up to swallow her vision broke the quiet of the fields, disrupted the steady humming of cicadas. They always finished feeding right before the school bus came. She never had time to clean up. Not that she wanted to. Mr. Mower, the bus driver, would give her a once-over and smile. "You're your father's daughter, that's for sure," he'd chuckle.

Of course, there were parts of the grime she didn't like as much. Like the rats that skittered in the house's walls. When they finally got into the cupboards Jean thought that maybe her parents would call somebody to kill the nasty things. Instead, her mother just moved all the dishes and silverware to the counters. Or the shit that caked the floor. Her father refused to take his work boots off in the house, so his cow-manure footprints left a fine layer of shit all over the hardwoods. Or the dirt firmly pressed into her fingernails, from digging out dandelions in her mother's flower beds. It took a lot to pull them out of the earth. She had to dig deep into the ground to get the roots. No matter how many times she scrubbed her hands, the soil stuck—fully embedded behind her nails.

Still, all of it was worth it. It all came with a lot of perks. She never had to clean her room. “Seems hypocritical,” her father said. She didn’t have boring chores like all the other girls in her grade—no folding clothes or scrubbing windows. Jean got adventures. She got to get up before the adults on Saturdays to take eggs from the chicken coop. The hens would bite up her fingers, making small cuts everywhere, but she didn’t mind it. Jean always walked away feeling like she won a fight. In the summer months, she’d husk corn and pick blackberries from the bushes. Both are messy processes, with silky fibers or deep blue-purple coloring sticking to her skin. This mess was way more fun than dealing with detergent or learning what the hell a “hospital corner” is. Jean also never had to look cute. Her father never made her wear one of those scratchy dresses, not even on Easter Sundays. “God doesn’t care what you got on, just as long as you’re at church,” he’d say. He also let her keep her hair real short, so she wouldn’t have to deal with it sticking to her face and neck, all sweat-slicked. Some girls at school would make fun of her for it, but Jean thought they looked silly. They constantly had to toss their hair out of their face. They looked like horses trying to swat out flies from their manes.

After her father collapsed in the fields one morning and never got back up, things changed. Her mother started talking ’bout not being able to take care of her anymore, of needing her to find a man by the end of high school. She sold every piece of land except for the small patch the house sat on. She put a list of tasks on the fridge each morning for Jean to get done, no longer tasks that required her to get dirty before school but the boring stuff they never did before, the washing and the scrubbing. She even had Jean grow her hair out, made sure she brushed it each morning and everything. Jean accepted it pretty early—realized it was easier to lean into the new way of things. She decided it was best to just look forward. Jean threw away all of the sentimental stuff, the cards her father wrote her for birthdays, the shabby shirts she’d wear out to the now-torn-down barn, the filth-caked boots her father wore that haunted the back doorstep. She started making friends with the girls who picked on her before. She invited them over to the house, hosted sleepovers where they made each other over, and gossiped about people in their grade, the ones who looked and acted like she used to. She’d look in the mirror with them and try not to think of herself as an animal all done up for a livestock show, groomed just like the blue-ribbon winners before they got slaughtered. She married a man right after graduation, a kid in her class that sat behind her in English and thought tugging at her ponytail was the best form of flirting. He worked in a factory downtown,

made enough money at eighteen years old to set them up nice and well. Jean moved out of her mother's house as fast as she could. Her mom looked mighty proud as she lugged her suitcase out the door. Jean grew to love her husband. She liked how he'd sometimes pull over on the side of the road to pluck wild sunflowers growing by the thick tar, how he'd give them to her so dramatically, like a big surprise even though she could watch him pick them out through the car window. Or how whenever he smoked he made a huge fuss over trying to blow the smoke away from her, even though the wind would pick it up and bring it to her anyways. He was always nice, never even raised his voice at her once. She knew she should be more than content. Whenever she met up with the girls she talked to in high school over breakfast after church and listened to them talk about their husbands' whiskey-soaked brains and their harsh tongues, she realized how ridiculous it would sound for her to complain. But she had this strong hate itching at the back of her brain.

The hate got the loudest when they'd sleep, a buzz in her head louder than cicadas. He always slept towards her, his hot breath blowing into her face or the back of her neck. She'd toss and turn all night, never able to fall asleep, too fixated on the horrible heat. Most nights she fantasized about reaching toward him and burying his breath into the mattress, only letting go long after the snoring stopped—after his arms stopped flailing and his legs stopped kicking and the night got so quiet she could hear her own heartbeat. She felt crazy, holding all this violence for a man who treated her so well, who she thought she loved. Jean knew she couldn't talk about it, so she buried it. She ignored the ways hate reached through. Justified taking money from his wallet and sticking it in the empty coffee tin in the far-right cupboard as just preparin' for a rainy day. Ignored how every time she went on a walk around the neighborhood her feet steered her south, towards the old farmland, like if she could just make it far enough she could get to a home that eroded long ago. Like she could find a Jean that no longer existed. Reasoned that she reached for the back of her husband's head some nights because she wanted to pet his hair, not because she wanted him suffocated in their too-soft bed sheets.

One night, lying in bed, his breath got to her more than she was used to. More than she could tolerate. She untucked herself from their blankets and snuck towards the bathroom. Her husband kept a pair of scissors near the sink, to cut the tags off his collars. She picked them up, trying not to drop them on the tile floor with her shaky hands. Jean took four steps out

of the bathroom, looking at her husband all cuddled up and blissful, before turning back around. She let out a hard breath, and took the scissors to her hair. She let it all fall down in tufts, not caring about the mess it made. Jean then slowly creaked open the medicine cabinet to find her hand mirror, to look at what she'd done. She got it out and glanced briefly at herself before turning away. She didn't care what she looked like at all. She put the mirror down and sprung into action. Jean crept towards the closet and flung all the clothes she could grab into a suitcase. She then walked towards the kitchen, no longer too concerned about the noise she made, and shoved the coffee tin into the bag. As Jean heard her husband stirring awake, a few low grumbles and groans, she grabbed their car keys they kept in a dish by the front door and hurried outside. She started the car and headed south. She was going to get her father's land back.



Mountainscape on Glass

Lydia Saunders

Painting

Prayer for a Brown Boy (Abridged)

Caroline Sprenger

In an alternate universe it was 1954 and it was my country,
my banana land which was overthrown by yours and it was
my country that would not sustain me and it was my boy body
who got onto that truck and it was me who was startled into a new
country after four weeks. And it would be me asking you how to
say “smile” in the new language, in your language so I could tell
you that I liked your smile. And all the dead boys would look like
me. All their names are the names of your uncles, your cousins,
your brother, all these bodies in transit are also your body,
they are also your friend, your sisters, your first girlfriend, your
neighbor. So now,

what was once thought to be permanent, eternal, immortal
all at once

shatters! into fragments of

glass,

shifts,

splits,

and yields, becomes refracted light.

in a monumental shift of power.

a rainbow fracture, a bursting gush of ocean, just like breath, like her water
breaking, like a living thing screaming its way into this world, like rupture,
like something coming up to the surface, like a baby’s little head pushing its
way through her body to greet a light brighter than any that has ever been
known before, like something exploding into being, like butterflies, a coral
reef, a whole ocean of everything and more, all of it, now, like
tectonic plates, like how nothing lasts forever, not even presidents. And I
will rip off the wings of any pedestaled man whose throat spits those old
words because there are no aliens on Earth and there is no lack of papers
that can stop a first love. Dethrone all tyrants, eliminate all impulse that
suggests cruelty can go on for even a second longer because I’m dreaming
of a poem with you at the center to shout out whatever you like and all the
world is your captive audience. I want systems created to keep you alive
because there is nothing more worth upholding, nothing more precious
than your head in my lap, lightly snoring and later you tell me you were
peeking through your eyelashes as I took pictures of you, No monument

or private property bigger than your snaggletooth smile, black hair on my pillow. We go to sleep touching

So now,

All the armed men evaporate and die,

Naturally, spontaneously, miraculously.

Their season is over; their flowered heads shrivel.

And we will have arrived into this most perfect place

We plant a new bejeweled garden and suddenly all this wealth is yours



É o que sobra - Anna Maria Maiolino

Ananya Bernardo

Screen Print

Grampa

Kayla Krest

Forever

How can an eternity go by so fast

Just yesterday I sat

Upon your lap

With the soft bristled brush stroking my tangles

Home I ran

Triumphant

To find that my hair was still tangled

The soft bristles had not torn apart the knots

The knots

The knots that I cannot untangle by myself

The knots that I cannot untangle without you

Forever

Yet only a year ago we stood

Under the tent as the men carried you

And the flag was folded

And handed to her

As we wept

A rock I placed

Upon your grave

Wishing just once more I could hear the story

Of the knots you untangled in your youth

Of the yarn

And your long hair that I could only imagine

Poured off of your bald head

Like the tears

Pour from my face

Endlessly

Only a year

Yet an eternity

Without your laugh

We drove away

And I looked back

Yet the porch was empty

You were not there

Not waving

Not crying
Not trying to be strong while we said goodbye
Never again will I hear your voice
As I run in the front door into your arms
Kayla RoseBud!
No more
Your cane's still there
Yet when I knock them down there is no yell
I never thought I ever
Would miss a holler
No neighbors to annoy with your endless pride
Yet I'm still Arch's granddaughter
Everywhere I go, everyone knows you
Knew you
And everywhere I go
They know me because of you
All that you do
All that you did
Is how I aspire to be
Loved
Trusted
The funeral director cried
The priest
The chef at the local diner
Not a single eye was dry
And then the world continued
But not for me
Because there's a knot in my hair
And I don't have you
And I can't do it without you



Duopoly
Caleb Huppert
Paint and Canvas

Ruptura

Caroline Sprenger

Crush: sweet rapture

Decision, like an incision.

My sadness, a river.

Someday, a man will split the sky for you

Like this sunset, a runny egg spilling out,
streaking across the whole sky, cracked yolk,

like splitting an orange,

Like sky and heaven both

Like the whole world conspiring so that you can be held
and it will all feel so nice.

My god is a river.

My heart is a wet balloon

Squishy, full, pumping

Thrashing like a fish

Mr. President:

God shifts the sky for you

Does your god bow and stutter for your eternal glory?

Does your injustice stammer at the immortal gates?

Does your statue break when all these fucking people forget you?

Do you shudder in the presence of blinding light?



Untitled
Pippin Bucholtz
Pen and Ink

Sincerely, your God

Caleb Huppert

The Prime Minister threw open the doors to the doors to the Royal Society of Physics. Everyone in the building bustled around in a nervous panic. Lab coats shuttered, papers flew, and pens clacked in a chaotic symphony of distress. At the clack of the Head of State's polished shoes, the room was snapped into silence. Every figure became a statue with its head tilted to the man striding in. One scientist with long brown hair that reached nearly to his shoulders gulped and stepped up to the entering man.

"Prime Minister Boris," the scientist stuttered. "We're glad you could make it. My team isn't sure how we should move forward with this discovery."

Boris folded his hands behind his back rather than taking the scientist's hand and surveyed the room. "Physics Head Dimitri, yes? I am no scientist. Why does this issue involve me?"

"It is better if you see for yourself, sir." The scientist had his hands poised like a gerbil, ready to grab at the Prime Minister like a piece of corn and carry it to his hiding hole.

"I do not have all day," Boris snapped. "I'm a busy man. Why could we not have discussed this over the phone?"

Dimitri Kozlova's hands trembled. "I really must show you."

Boris looked Kozlova in the eyes, but the man didn't flinch. It was clear to Boris that his worry wasn't of him but of something else. Boris feared nothing anymore after he had experienced war, the political gambit, the consequences of decisions, but to a physicist surely these were all merely determined, physical processes. They were nothing to be feared; they were fated to happen. If Kozlova was afraid, it was worth investigating.

"Fine," Boris said. He checked his watch. "I have to be getting to Bristol in ten, so you had better be quick."

"It will only take us a moment to explain, sir," Kozlova said. He led Boris to a computer array and flipped through papers. "You see, one of the purposes of this lab is to try and discover a Theory of Everything."

"Yes, I am aware," Boris interrupted impatiently.

"Yes, and we thought we were close to discovering it. We hypothesized here that if we could pin down a specific constant using the particle accelerator, it would be the key to our equations, which would unify general and special relativity."

"And I don't see how any of this concerns me. You still haven't

explained to me why I was called in to deal with such a useless matter. What am I doing here, Kozlova?"

The scientist backed away and a few of his papers slipped through his hands. On the floor was a large readout sheet of binary digits with a translation scribbled in the margins. "Ah! There it is," he announced. "This, this is why." He handed the Prime Minister the sheet.

"We found the constant," the scientist explained, "but the result was troubling. It came out to be, after the decimal, a binary code, which translated into a repeating message copied into every language on Earth."

The Prime Minister looked over the sheet idly and scoffed. "For a prank then? You called me in here for a prank?"

"Sir, we didn't do this. I can rerun the calculations in front of you to prove it!"

"Then this is some know-it-all intern's idea of a joke." Boris dropped the paper back to the ground, and Kozlova scrambled to pick it back up. "Equations can be manipulated, computers hacked, I don't see what you're getting so uppity about."

"Sir!" the scientist yelled. He trembled in his legs, but he held his fists tight. "This isn't some joke. We are very serious. The message even includes language, which have not been translated yet. A group of physicists worked together with linguists to use the message as a key to decode those languages we didn't understand, and it worked. We know there's been no mistake, because we have repeated the test over and over again for months, and we have rerun the calculations more times than there are hairs on my head!"

The Prime Minister did not blink. "Read the message."

Kozlova hesitated, but he gripped the page and read. His voice started shakily at first, but as he went on, it gained some vigor. "You are trying to discover the deepest mysteries of the Universe. You have come very far, and you have infinitely farther to go before you know anything. Do not let this motivate you. Give up. The Universe is not knowable. I have tried to discover its secrets, and if I knew them, I would have told you. Sincerely, your God."

The Prime Minister was frozen in his stare as the scientist timidly looked up from the paper. There was a span of minutes where the two stood motionless at each other. Then the Prime Minister turned around.

"Anyways, I have a plane to catch," he said.





captivated by the moment you are living in

Eva Hart

Digital Photograph

This is a counterpart to a work that was published in our 2020 issue.

I Accidentally Re-Merged Consciousnesses with Myself in the Old Hydro-Electric Power Plant over the River by the Butterfly Bushes on Sunday

Harper Reese

Everyone has been there at some point. It's the one with the peeling yellow paint on the support shafts, the rusting catwalks, and the big metal arm that folds out over the water. There's an old dial phone in a pile of broken window bits, boxes with switches and hanging wires, and the skeletal remains of old, old barrels. This is the place with the ivy-covered door that says "Trespassing" without making any further observations.

Ever since I accidentally cloned myself in the science center, my new twin and I have been growing in different directions, like roots reaching towards the water table in a y-pipe, a cloud wringing itself out over a continental divide, a cat in mid-air tied to a piece of toast with jam on one side. This isn't sad, necessarily. Nothing is necessarily anything, but often nothing is the thing that it is, and is not the thing that it isn't necessarily isn't. Anyway.

When we all had to come home, it was the first time I had seen Jazz in six months. We hugged when he got out of the car, of course, but for the first time it felt like hugging a different person. Juicemonger (our cat) hopped from my shoulder to his, and hissed at the heat radiating off the pavement. The pavement sizzled contemplatively.

"I think my shoes are melting," said Jazz.

"Let's get your stuff out of the car."

"Are you happy to be home?"

"I'll have to see," I said.

"Ow." Jazz dropped a box on his feet and Juicemonger knocked over the umbrella urn.

Jazz and I were sitting on a freshly fallen tree three weeks later and it was too sunny for talking. From my spot I could just see the highest window in our house where Juicemonger was humming at the world behind the glass.

"Maybe," Jazz said, "it's the testosterone."

"What?" I said.

"Why I want to go new places so much."

"Where in particular?" I said.

"I was hoping you would know."

I thought about it. "Sometimes it seems like there's nothing new to see or do in the whole world..."

"It do be like that sometimes."

"It does do indeed."

We sat there spinning our hollow thoughts for a while. I looked up in time to see Juicemonger leave his window to go on his grand adventure in the Rat Kingdom. I felt un-new, and the bark was getting rougher.

"Quequeg," I said.

"Squelch," Jazz said.

My phone buzzed.

"The prince of Luxembourg is in the driveway."

"Oh, cool."

We walked to the street, where Oren and Sawyer and Jake and the prince of Luxembourg were waiting. It was hard to see through the car window. "Pile in, nerds! We're going Shopping," said Jake.

"All of the stores are closed," I said as Jazz and I crammed in the back.

"By shopping," Oren said, "they mean breaking into the abandoned hydro-electric power station."

"I always thought it was a water-filtration plant," said Sawyer.

"Fucking maybe, I don't know," said Jake. "It's abandoned."

"It's abandoned," said Oren.

"I love that abandoned facility," Jazz and I said at the same time.

Perhaps we were still more similar than different. Somehow that made me jealous. Like he had all the interesting, jam-side of the bread memories and all the rest of our luggage was identical.

"Where's the prince of Luxembourg?" I asked.

"He couldn't make it," said Sawyer.

"Aw, beans," said Jazz.

It was very windy outside, and the interior of the abandoned hydro-electric power station (or abandoned water-filtration plant) was calm and beautiful, and teeming with entropy. There was a big wheel that was all rusted over, a conference of metal cylinders, a singing copper cable, and an

old broken phone humming on the broken glass. Jake was playing loud music, and I was poking at the dark corners with a stick I found.

I felt heavy and unsettled, like too many lemon bars. There was a switch in my brain that made me talkative, but the switch was flipping back and forth today with the telltale clicking of disconnected circuitry.

I went into a side room and found the river inside it. There was a scrap-metal balcony overlooking it in the sun. I sat down with my legs over the rushing.

Oren found me there balancing and not looking closely at anything. They were wearing an eyepatch that I must not have noticed earlier and had a new scar that ran from their eyebrow to their cheek.

“Hello,” Oren said.

“Good afternoon, welcome to the scenic river overlook.”

“Your hair’s really poofy,” they said.

“It does that. Why are you wearing an eyepatch?”

“I just came back from a distant dystopian future. Everyone wears an eyepatch in the distant future.”

“That is good to know.”

“Is something wrong with Jazz and you?”

“Hhhhhhhhh. Dunno, man.”

I watched all the water go by.

They were winding and unwinding some wires around their fingers.

“Don’t be jejune, June.”

“It’s nothing, I mean. It’s jealousy, a little.”

“Then you can’t hold it in your mouth forever. Jealousy is the watermelon seed of the emotions.”

“That’s a strange metaphor.”

“It’s very much not a metaphor. If you ignore it, eventually you’ll have to swallow it, and physicians don’t recommend swallowing watermelon seeds.”

“I guess they wouldn’t.”

“It’s more of a guideline. Not like apple seeds or small marbles.”

“I’ll take that into consideration.”

“Will you?”

There was an old old tree standing across the river, leaning towards us, too close to the bank. For just a second, I saw Juicemonger running down the inside of it, pursued by the Rat King in His Hidden Majesty, like there was a spiral staircase in the hollow interior. I listened for the sounds of pursuit, but the river was swallowing the sound.

I looked back at Oren, who was peeling the paint off the metal scaffolding with a knife. "I have a lot of things in my consideration right now, so it'll have to go in the queue," I said.

The tree creaked like a rocking-chair rotting upstairs. Oren looked up at it. "If that tree goddamn falls on us."

"I've never had a tree fall on me before."

"Yeah, it sucks."

Jake stepped out of the doorway, "Sawyer found a salamander."

"Cool," I said.

Remerging with your disconnected accidental duplicate feels wet and electric, like dropping your ice cream and catching it all without missing even a drop. The old tree falling on the water-filtration plant or the hydro-electric power station (which was, in fact, actually a paper mill) in a thundering shower of limbs and bark did something inexplicable to the inexplicable machinery inside. Perhaps it was the entropy rising off the river, all that swallowed sound coming back up, or because the dial phone was just getting ready to ring again, or because the buttons were bored of being inoperable. Maybe it was the world's way of telling the Prince of Luxemburg that he should have come and hung out, because interesting things were happening to us and he was missing out.

Or, maybe, it was because I talked to Jazz about everything I had been thinking, feeling jealous and fractured, and they had been feeling it too, and we hugged, and it felt like wrapping your arms around yourself, finally, because we were tired of being apart.



Head in the Clouds
Kylee Duarte
Digital Photograph

Floating

Inez

I can feel my body ascending

Towards the sun

My escalated emotions have subsided

Drifting along my side as

Sun rays tickle my chin

I feel at peace

Still.

The perfect balance of what's above

And below

What must stay

What must go

My mind is quiet,

All can hear is stillness

Teleporting a whisper

To me

That all I need is to be

Me as myself

An exposed soul

Transmitting love.

Free

Angela Nelson

Don't lose yourself in your labor of visions.
Your mind is a labyrinth of imagination,
and you become Theseus holding tight to your string.
Creation, you think, is the only way out,
and so, you expertly create, weave your words together,
drag your paint brush across the canvas,
and perform the melodies that you hear in your mind,
not realizing the curse has already claimed you.
Your skin will be caked with paint, clay, and sweat
and you will start to wonder where it stops, and you begin.

I know this curse better than anyone
for I have seen it time and time again.
I stand in my delicate pose,
watching people watch me.
They circle and marvel
at my marbled skin.
Unyielding, unbreakable, unearthly.
Then they move on to the next piece that
catches their eye and my image
fades from their minds.
They never seem to notice the crack in my waist.
The one that glows golden with life
and spreads like veins across my body
with each century that passes.
My curse is breaking.



Untitled
Haydyn Foulke
Oil Painting

Items on the Trans Agenda

Ainsley Kalb

The sound, but not texture, of breaking glass
 Spiders crawling across webs of bones
 Laughter distorted through a funhouse mirror
 The texture, but not shine, of broken glass

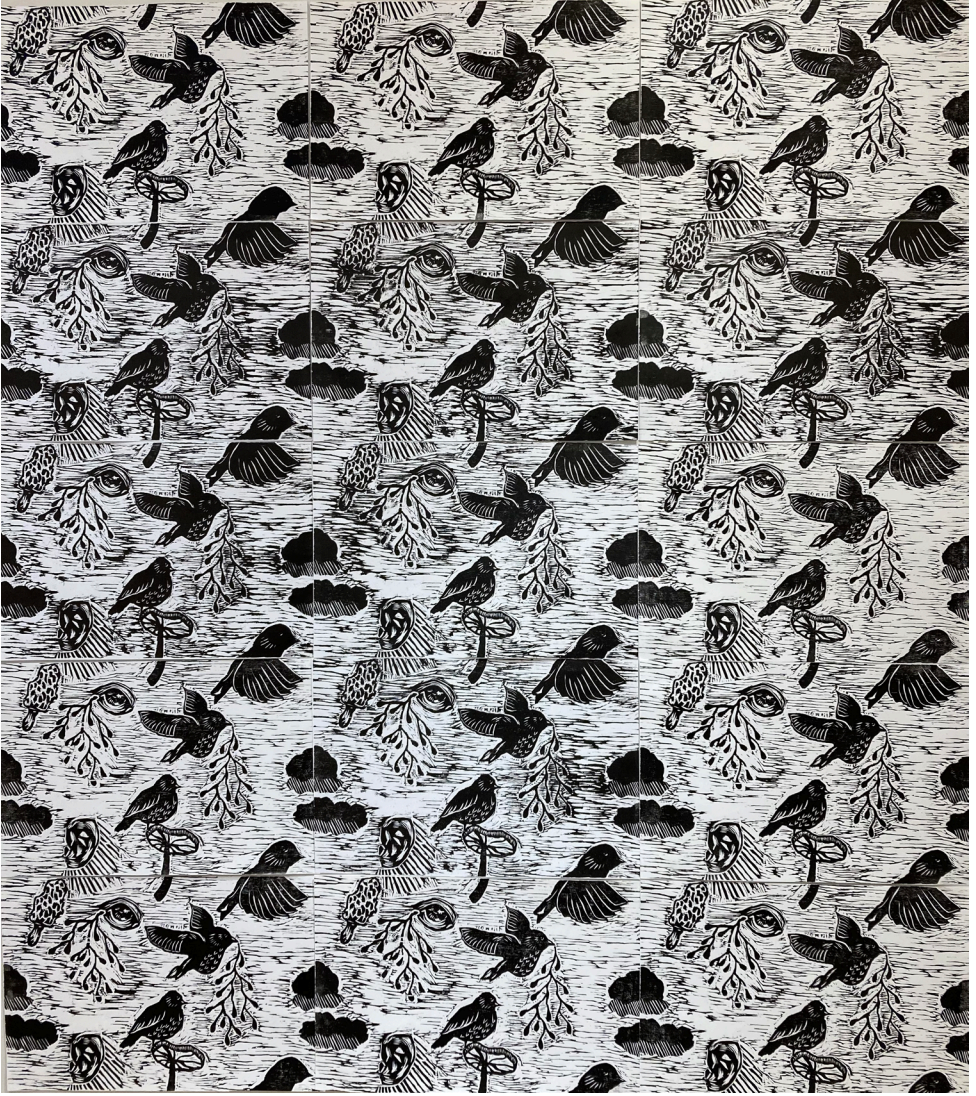
Missives from uncaring stars
 The iron gate of a thrift store
 The gilded cage of a distant market
 Resplendent but ill-fitting stardust

A protective circle of eggshells
 Lungs full of hourglass sand
 Snarling snarls of someone else's hair
 Robe doffed at midnight hour

Polite applause at a demolition derby
 Mocking medals for warrior courage
 Effervescent, absent praise
 A trophy, pinned and mounted

A long dream
 A beautiful long dream
 A beautiful long dream of peace
 A beautiful long dream of peace and joy

 A beautiful long dream of peace and joy, uninterrupted until
 An alarm clock rings hollow



repeat woodcut. decomposition, flight

Haydyn Foulke

Woodcut

Lavender Scares

Rou Yu Tan

When I look into your blue eyes, I see
a snowstorm too stubborn to be unveiled.
I sense, you too, imagine fantasy
from a break in your siege where I'm impaled.

I hint my ailments, with weeds I reject;
feverishly thawing, in ice, I bathe;
we secretly pluck pansies grown erect;
deep into a treacherous land, we wade.

Reckless, blinded, enough lavender scares.
Have we revealed too much on wrong judgment?
We discuss Artemis' curves like we care;
for if we crave a touch: imprudent.

Fainthearted, yield beards for our naked state;
illusioned that we can feign standard fate.

Five Generations

Ainsley Kalb

I. Gaia

Through genesis unshackled by love or lust
(The word parthenogenetic is not very pretty)
Bears alone a few children,
The firstborn her only equal:
Not just her son, but her husband
And her night sky.

II. Uranus

A father fearing his children
Makes his mother-wife
Drag them back into her belly.

She fumes, until one day she
Tells her children
To stand up to their father's evil.
(I suspect she must have been mighty enough to do it herself,
But relationship abuse takes a huge toll, so maybe not?)
Only one child is brave enough;
She produces diamonds within the rough folds of her ravaged body for him.

III. Kronos

Forges the diamond into a scythe,
And when his father comes to once again
Rape his mother, his mother-wife,
Kronos castrates the encroaching evil,
And, with his siblings,
Escapes the womb.

He claims as his prize Rhea,
His sister-wife,
She bears him children,
But he has learned from his father:
He eats them himself.

That way no one can stop him.
(A hubris that surely couldn't lead to any sort of comeuppance.)

Gaia, exhausted, and Rhea, irate,
Conspire to save a child named

IV. Zeus

Then,
He eventually defeats his father
(I'm sure you know the story,
And if not, too bad;
Their physical struggle doesn't interest me).
He will go on to become a man of great renown, but first,

He marries Metis
(Thankfully not his immediate relative)
She bears him a child
(Uh oh!)
Zeus has learned from his father
And from his father before him
Gaia and Uranus advise him
To swallow Metis whole.
(Perhaps Gaia thinks this a more merciful option, or has simply
Drank enough of the ambrosiac Kool-Aid at this point.)
He does.

He then marries six more women in turn:
(Thankfully these other marriages end without divine cannibalism)
His aunt,
A woman who reminds him of the wife still alive inside him,
His sister,
Another aunt,
A distant cousin,
And his hottest sister
(You may have heard of her)

Until one day, he has a splitting headache
And out comes

V. Athena

Who has learned from her father
And his father
And his father
And his mother.

Athena,
In her wisdom.
Has no kids.

And
(Because this is my story,
Even if I stole most of it)
She frees her mothers:

Hera, Metis, Rhea, Gaia
From their deadbeat husbands
(I am too squeamish and mortal
For the appropriate gore)

She kills Hephaestus, too
(Not for ableist reasons;
For attempted-rape reasons)
And, quests completed,
Fucks Aphrodite,
Then takes a well deserved vacation to Crete.



Corridor of Time
Clorandius
Woodcut

This work is a counterpart to works that were published in our 2019, 2020, and 2021 issues.

Meet the Jorksons

Episode 4: Absolute, Inviolable Laws

Harper Reese

EXT. THE SKY AT NIGHT

It is raining on a brick sidewalk. An EARTHWORM is drowning in a puddle smaller than a fingernail.

THE WORM IN THE PUDDLE: A person is a story about what a person is. A story is a thing that walks in circles. Does a bug tell stories about itself? If it did, would that make it a person? Can a story be told from the outside in? Why does a bug walk only in circles? What do you know? You know the bug to be a bug, because it walks in circles. But you cannot know yourself because you cannot watch yourself walk in circles, and you cannot mark out your path as the path of a circle. When you mark the path, you will know yourself. When you know yourself, you will know yourself as a bug. And you will no longer be a bug.

THE BIRDS IN THE HEARTH: A bird is a transitory thing. A bird is a story that is told about a bird. A bird is a little note that says "I love you." "I love you. I love you." I love you because you are the poet-stage. I love you because you are the poet's song. I love you because you are the heckler. We love you even though you are a heckler. The song of the heckler is an improvisational melody and you are the eye, the heart, the dying goose and the grass in the lake. You are the dog and the tick. You are the sun and the tick on the sun, and all the pinpricks and all the pain that it causes.

The worm eats the birds. It is an act of apology, based in love.

The worm fixes itself in the sky, and it is a bridge. A table, a chair, and a door grow on the long plateau of its apex. The sky is black. The floor (the worm) is pink (like a worm). On top of the table is an empty orange vase.

TECH JORKSON is asleep at the table. She has her arms folded softly around her head, which is resting in an open Trigonometry textbook.

The worm-body hums.

Tech lifts her head from the math textbook. She shivers.

TECH: It's so cold. Why is it so cold here?

She looks down the arc of the worm's corpse and sees the suburb two or three hundred feet below her. She sees the cold sun under her house, warming the other side of the pale planet.

TECH: How is it fair that you can't know how cold I am?

She props her head up with her hands.

TECH: You can't feel the cold. I'm not saying that you don't, or that you aren't right now. But that you can't. I can't make you feel cold. I could make you feel other things. But I couldn't make you cold.

She shivers.

TECH: It's coldest on my back, where there's a gap in the chair. You can't feel that. Unless you're cold too, now. Right? But think. If you think, you can feel the texture of a brick wall under your hand. You can imagine the feeling of throwing a rolling-chair off a second story balcony. Think about the motion, and where the weight is as you swing it back, and how it sounds as it hits the ground. Clatter, clatter, clunk. Maybe the armrest breaks.

She tightens her hoodie.

TECH: I can't work in these conditions.

Tech picks up her Trigonometry textbook and starts walking down the side of the worm, towards home.

EXT. THE JORKSON'S BACKYARD

UMBRELLA KID: More Beach Balls! More Baseballs!

All the neighborhood kids have gathered in the Jorkson's backyard. They are throwing all the sports equipment into a big oak tree at the edge of the yard like NBC's Mary Carillo describes in her 2004 on-air breakdown about Olympic Badminton.

The children throw the baseballs and beach balls into the tree with martial efficiency. The tree swallows them and swells larger and larger, groaning with sports equipment.

ROBBIE: Yay!

More children arrive. There is a throng of unattended children chanting the names of the sports and eviscerating the garage. LILY and NEW WEBSTER'S COLLEGIATE DICTIONARY can be seen here behind a window making lemonade. They cannot make

it fast enough to end the line of children that has snaked its way in and out of the house.

NEW WEBSTER: Are these lines intersecting?

LILY: Hey, you had firsts already, Carlos! Get outta here!

The tree looms over all the other houses in the development. Its roots burrow through the yards and break the pavement. Car alarms go off. Basements are caved in.

Tech enters the house. She wades through the line of children with her Trig book over her head.

LILY: Hey, Tech.

TECH: I need to do my math work.

LILY: For Mr. Bruin's class right? Isn't that next week?

TECH: No, it's today. Everything is today.

Umbrella Kid enters through the fridge. A laugh track plays.

UMBRELLA KID: It's been Today for 3 days!

TECH: I can't keep sleeping on a worm.

LILY: What?

Tech shakes her book.

TECH: AAUAUGHAGUH!!! The back of the worm is cold!!!! And if I can't I embody in you the simple feeling of being cold, even just on your midriff where your jacket is a little too short then how

can I even begin to tell you about what it feels like to sit in a shopping cart and stare at the sky fade from the pink haze to the darkness wishing your friends were there too? How can I hope to describe the qualia of the moment where you're standing on the side of a mountain letting a fly crawl all over your arm, or you're in the back of a car in the rain watching two people getting soaked on the side of the road. You're in love with them! Because they aren't you and because the world is filled with little multi-colored rocks like seeds in a stranger's palm, in a tail of a cigarette, in a playing card passed to you on a thick carpet, and the corn-colored feeling of that carpet as it presses into your stomach and makes you a little sick, but not sick enough to sit on it properly!

LILY: What?

TECH: Aren't you tired of being in a place where we only share touchable concepts, but not touchable feelings? Nonsense. Stupid.

LILY: Did you get more lemons?

Tech opens up her backpack and dumps more lemons out than should be able to fit. They tumble onto the counter with thick, lemony thuds.

Outside, the great tree swells to the size of a planetary body. The roots destroy the kitchen, the lemonade is spilled, and the crowd of children are scattered. Its trunk is a plane that sprouts infinitely through the ring of the worm, two toroid bodies, indelibly linked in the black sky, like onion rings.

LILY: Well, this is a pickle.

UMBRELLA KID: No, it's an onion ring.

BECK and MISTER, the Jorkson children's other two parents, rush out. Beck is in a floral dress and apron, and Mister is in their Summoning robe.

In the black sky, the worm and the tree merge into an oscillating sphere (a devouring plane). It squeezes itself into a state of infinite destiny (like lemonade). It devours the sun.

BECK (really drawn out, looking at the camera):
Welp... there goes the neighborhood.

Chunks of the earth are being sucked up into the sky. Lily is clinging onto a railing. None of the Jorksons seem to be affected by the massive shift in gravity.

UMBRELLA KID (sarcastic): How on Earth are we gonna solve this one!?

BOUNCE is the sky. BOUNCE is the water. BOUNCE is a dog. It is a lifeless thing, pulled by a wire. Its visage fills the sky, its mouth is open, as if ready to consume the wildly gyrating black hole.

TECH: BOUNCE, NO! STOP THAT!

Bounce's eye, the size of a supercluster, looks over at Tech, his mouth still open.

TECH: Bad dog! You cannot eat the devouring plane! I've done the math. We have to throw Robbie at it.

ROBBIE: Robbie!

Lily's grip on the railing begins to weaken.

LILY: Please hurry!

Mister spouts a set of arcane syllables and Robbie is catapulted into the sky. Robbie becomes a speck. The speck fizzles and bounces off the singularity. There is the sound of a piece of GLASS SHATTERING, and a DESCENDING SLIDE WHISTLE NOISE. Everything reassembles itself and the Jorksons all come to rest, motionless, in the living room. The saucers unshatter, the egg timers are rewound, a tea kettle cools from a boil.

After a second of the house being fully assembled, the Jorksons begin to move around normally. New Webster opens a newspaper. Beck goes to the kitchen. Mister manifests a magic door that partially blocks a different door.

Lily, her hair a mess, minor gashes on her skin, stands up from behind a couch, bewildered.

LILY: I'm so dizzy. Why are my ears ringing?

Everyone laughs, as though she had given a one-liner, the credits roll out, and the Jorkson's theme song plays.

All the furniture combusts, as pastiche.

A message appears on the dark screen:

THE END.

LILY: Um. Hello?

There's no one around.

Tech peels back a layer of the darkness and steps through it.

TECH: Yeah, sorry about that, the producers like to end the episode within like a very set framework.

LILY: Where are we, exactly?

TECH: Um. I don't know. The End? The End is a place, like any other place. Things collect in the residuum here.

She points to a worm in a puddle on the sidewalk. A pair of birds flying overhead, over the grass on the hill.

LILY (amazed): There are stars here...

TECH (looking up): I had never noticed.

They look together.

LILY: You know... You've saved my life, like, countless times now. But also being around you seemingly is... cosmically hazardous? I don't know how to feel about it.

TECH: I... Does that mean you don't wanna hang out as much?

LILY: No, no. I think it means...

And Lily leans over and gives Tech a kiss on the cheek.

LILY: It means something like that.

And whatever chill Tech felt on her midriff, she doesn't feel it anymore.

Ananya Bernardo
Pippin Bucholtz
Grace Calus
Clorandĭus
Kylee Duarte
Emma English
Haydyn Foulke
Alesha G.
Eva Hart
Caleb Huppert
Inez
Ainsley Kalb
Grace Kauder
Kayla Krest
Avi Kumar
Angela Nelson
Alys Parker
Harper Reese
Lydia Saunders
Caroline Sprenger
Rou Yu Tan
Anonymous Toothers
Ezra Wilson

